

W. S. B.

**AGENDA COVER MEMO**

---

**AGENDA DATE:** 2/22/056  
**MEMORANDUM DATE:** 2/16/06  
**TO:** Board of Commissioners  
**DEPARTMENT:** County Administration  
**PRESENTED BY:** Melinda Kletzok/Amber Fossen  
Public Information Office  
**AGENDA ITEM TITLE:** REPORT/ Employee Communications Plan 2006

I. **MOTION:** Information only

II. **AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY**

The office of Public Information, in conjunction with the Lane County Management Team and unions, is undertaking a major employee communications initiative as part of the Board of Commissioner approved Public Information Initiative.

The employee communications plan is presented to the Board of County Commissioners for review, comment, and as information about the opportunities to participate in enhancing the frequency and intensity of which the leadership of Lane County communicates policy and operational challenges to more than 1,600 employees.

III. **BACKGROUND/IMPLICATIONS OF ACTION**

A. **Board Action and Other History**

The Public Information Initiative unanimously approved by the Board of Commissioners on January 25, 2006 will help Lane County bridge the wide information gaps in citizen understanding of the issues that have been identified by the Board of Commissioners, task forces, and citizen surveys. Plans to address this information deficit are outlined in Lane County's adopted Strategic Objective Number 2.

*Objective 2: Engage and inform citizens about Lane County Government services.*

Employees are one of the most important audiences for any message because they directly provide County services to the public. They are the 'faces and voices' of Lane County, but may not have all the information they need to answer questions they encounter by the public. Many will also wish to know how County financial and service issues affect them personally.

A plan to help inform and empower employees has been created for review and comment by the Board of Commissioners. (attached)

**B. Board Goals**

The Strategic Plan calls for refining County communications, recognizing the importance of effectively communicating to employees and using methods to assure that employees are sufficiently informed not only about their own departments, but others as well.

**C. Financial and/or Resource Considerations**

This is an information item only. A budget for the Public Information Initiative has been approved. The Employee Communications Plan will be completed by Lane County Public Information staff using existing resources. There are only minimal costs associated.

**D. Analysis**

The employee communications component of the Board of Commissioners' adopted Public Information Initiative is entitled "Empowering Employees; Taking Control of Our Future" Lane County Employee Communications Plan 2006.

This employee communications outreach effort will increase employee understanding of the County's system of services, funding issues and how the County and its employees use limited resources to deliver critical services and programs effectively.

**IV. TIMING/IMPLEMENTATION**

Within the next few weeks, all employees will receive a preview of the content, scope and timing of the Public Information Initiative. The all-employee meetings will provide an opportunity for County leadership to inform employees from all departments about the need to engage and inform the public about Lane County services and government performance.

**V. FOLLOW-UP**

As the Public Information Initiative moves forward, regular progress reports back to the board will occur every six weeks. The Employee Communications Plan progress will be included in these reports.

**VI. ATTACHMENTS**

The Lane County Employee Communications Plan 2006 is attached for review.

## **“Empowering Employees; Taking Control of Our Future” Lane County Employee Communications Plan 2006**

Lane County is less than one full budget cycle away from major, structural budget shortfalls, stretching into the future as far as the eye can see. The rising cost of providing services coupled with increased benefit costs and a deficient tax base leaves the organization with two choices: Raise revenue or keep cutting programs, services and workforce.

How we handle challenges will have a major impact on Lane County’s future.

### **Twenty Years of Growing Demand, Declining Resources**

The County’s structural funding crisis is not new. For more than two decades, the County’s system of programs and services has been whittled down. In the 90s, Lane County’s property tax rate was frozen at \$1.28 per \$1,000 of assessed value – a rate below most Oregon counties. As the tax base remains constant, expenditures continue to increase to meet inflation, cost-of-living adjustments and rising benefit costs.

In the last three years, Lane County has cut more than \$27 million in expenditures, mostly by cutting the size of the workforce. Employees by far consume the greatest portion of the budget. Since 1980, Lane County has downsized its employee base by 200 while the community it serves has grown by more than 60,000 people.

What remains is a employee base that is inadequate to serve and protect the citizens and infrastructure of our community. Reducing employee levels and cutting back services has bought the County some short term stability. Lane County is stable but anemic through one budget cycle. After that, the size and scope of programs and services provided to the community will be downsized unless additional sustained revenue is realized.

The issue of funding sustainability affects all departments. Most programs and services rely on a number of different revenue streams for funding, including amusement tax, hotel tax, car tax, property taxes, federal funding and various grants. Very few services provided by the County sustain solely on one source. Therefore, when a revenue stream is eliminated, all departments feel the ripples of its effects.

### **Inventory of Strengths: Employees Top the List**

An important part of Lane County’s mission is to provide its approximately 336,000 citizens with an inter-related system of services that strives to meet community demands. Currently, the County is falling short, not for lack of effort but for lack of resources. County employees have faced nearly two decades of doing more with less. They are now confronted daily with doing less with less.

Lane County’s prime asset is its 1,600 diverse employees. All contribute their unique skills, thoughts and services to one of the 72 different divisions that make up Lane County Government.

Employees deserve the facts about looming funding shortfalls, as well as all the information necessary to answer their own questions and those of the public. Many will also wish to know how the situation affects them personally.

**Each Lane County employee encounters a public audience, impacting friends and family with their actions and opinions. They are on the frontline. It is crucial to increase their knowledge and understanding of the issues facing Lane County.**

Effective communications drives employee's knowledge and understanding of the issues. Timely, factual and comprehensive information that is relevant and easily accessible makes employees informed, effective potent ambassadors of the County.

No single communications vehicle will effectively reach the diverse employee base; hence, a number and variety of different media will be used to increase understanding of Lane County Government, what it provides and how the County uses its limited resources to deliver those services and programs efficiently and with value and great care to the community.

As part of a sustained, elevated communication outreach effort, the Office of Public Information will coordinate employee meetings; publish and post information; and use tools such as the Intranet, FastLane and other vehicles to reach employee groups.

This communications plan anticipates and considers:

- The need to effectively educate/inform employees in an accelerated manner;
- Employee knowledge of issues surrounding the County's fiscal outlook;
- Employees have limited time to assimilate a lot of information; they need to be actively engaged in the communication process;
- County employees are now "doing less with less," and need concise, active communication on how efficient they have become to serve growing public demand for services and programs.

## **GOAL**

**The goal of this plan is to increase employee understanding and awareness of the system of programs and services provided by Lane County and how financial shortfalls impact the system's effectiveness. Deep cuts to public health; safety and other services have undermined the community's health and well being. As the County's frontline with the public, it's important for employees to know the facts surrounding Lane County's budget situation, including which funds the Board has discretion over and how multiple revenues support services.**

## **Higher Profile; No More Information Void**

Lane County is embarking on a new course of raising its profile. In recognition of the valuable role communication plays in a democratic government and for public

institutions, the Board adopted a county public information plan in 1997. It updated the plan in 2002. Given Lane County's economic and service challenges in the coming years, it has a responsibility to reach out to the community with more information.

Throughout discussions of the County's financial picture, Lane County has been urged by numerous task forces, community groups, citizens and employees to do a better job of educating and informing the public. Community leaders would like to see Lane County address the information gap about what Lane County does and how it does it. Here lies an opportunity to provide information about the state of Lane County Government as a whole. Community members, city leaders and commissioners agree the County's financial problem will not go away and the time has come to take action. Employees are a primary audience and partner in making those actions successful.

Opportunities include:

- Increasing employee understanding of Lane County Government and how it's financed;
- Strengthening communication channels;
- Increasing government transparency.

## **OBJECTIVES**

To increase understanding among 70 percent of the employee population of the County's system of services, funding issues, and how the County and its employees use limited resources to deliver critical services and programs effectively. The initiative will:

- Increase employee understanding of County finances (past and present) and the variety of funding sources, including their relative stability;
- Increase awareness of the system of services provided by the County, ensuring that employees know the basic and essential facts;
- Enhance trust in leadership and 'transparency';
- Increase accessibility to information about Lane County.

## **STRATEGIES**

Accomplishing an effective communications plan will require using a variety of media and methods to connect with employees including:

- Developing consistent messages to educate employees throughout all departments;
- Creating opportunities (both formal and informal) to disseminate factual information;
- Providing written and online materials about County finances and the system of services provided by the County;

- Creating a stronger channel of communication between leadership and employees;
- Enlisting the leadership of organized labor to facilitate communication with their membership;
- Developing opportunities for employees to learn from one another;
- Using contests and events to educate.

## **STRATEGIES & TACTICS**

**Strategy: Developing consistent messages to educate employees throughout all departments. The main messages need to be factual and easy to recall.**

- Convene an Employees Communications Steering Committee to represent diverse departments and meet with the Public Information Office to help identify and refine the information plan and messages
- Identify three core messages that the majority of County employees should know by initiative's end
- Create and use a variety of communications tools and vehicles that are consistent and reinforce the core messages

**Strategy: Providing written and online materials about programs, services and County finances. These materials must be readily available to the employee population (on Intranet, Web site, placed throughout departments etc.)**

- Develop materials (Quick facts, 'Did You Know' bullets for e-mails and other communications, brochures, posters, calendars, etc.) about County Government services as a whole as well as on various issues (Secure Rural Schools, County Finances, Systems of Services and challenges facing the County and community)
- Create information packets to help educate employees (make available to department heads and for others as requested or post on Intranet)
- Identify and work with those most likely within each division to help get the materials into employee's hands

**Strategy: Creating opportunities (both formal and informal) to disseminate factual information. By providing more opportunities for employees to discuss issues with elected officials and directly impacted employees (DA, DYS, etc.), they will increase their awareness of the financial challenges facing the County's system of programs and services.**

- Create an employee event (catered by DYS culinary program)
- PowerPoint/video presentations
- Employee meetings
- Recruit public health/public safety/public works and other service employees to discuss how the cuts have impacted their ability to effectively serve the public

**Strategy: Creating a stronger channel of communication between the BCC and employees. This is important to enhancing trust in leadership while increasing the initiative's transparency.**

- Weekly "From the Commissioners Desk" . . . memos to employees about initiative progress, timely issues related to programs, services, County finances, etc.
- Increase Commissioner Op-eds/Commentaries
- Continue Commissioner recaps
- Ensure a presence of leadership in FastLane, Intranet and other communications

**Strategy: Enlisting the County's organized labor leaders to facilitate communications with their membership. Providing information to labor groups will help increase employee awareness of the issues facing Lane County and increase information accessibility.**

- Include organized labor leadership in communications planning efforts
- Establish a process for communicating with labor leadership – they serve as an important communication channel for disseminating information to employees
- Work with labor group leadership to get feedback on attitudes related to employee communication initiative and public initiative

**Strategy: Creating opportunities for employees to learn from one another. This will give employees better understanding of the issues facing their colleagues.**

- Schedule periodic departmental tours or provide opportunities for employees to shadow those who work in different areas
- Employee questionnaires . . . results posted to Web/Intranet/ FastLane
- Produce County service related articles for each FastLane ("Day in the life of")
- Feedback loops and channels made more robust, two-way and consistent

**Strategy: Developing multiple contests is another way to bring the facts to the table so that by the initiative's end, 70 percent of employees will have increased their understanding of Lane County's system of services.**

- Contests: Monthly pop quizzes on the Intranet, write-in fact quizzes, scavenger hunt . . . facts spread throughout County departments for employees to compile and then submit (possible prizes such as additional TM, gift certificates, shirts with County message on it, emergency kits, free self-defense class and other prizes)

## TACTICS

- Identify three core messages that the majority of employees should know by initiative's end
- Create and use a variety of communications tools and vehicles that are consistent and reinforce the core messages
- Calendars/fliers (etc.) in every department with essential "Did You Know . . ." facts
- Publish brochures with clearly stated facts about Lane County and its finances
- Produce County service related articles for FastLane ("Day in the life of . . .")
- Retool FastLane as a communications vehicle for employee information
- Employee meetings that would include: Powerpoint/Video presentations; helping train/guide department heads to share factual information with employees
- Recruit public health/public safety/public works and other service employees to discuss how the cuts have impacted their ability to effectively serve the public
- Feedback loops and channels made more robust, two-way and consistent
- Weekly "From the Commissioners Desk" . . . memos to employees about initiative progress, timely issues related to programs, services, County finances, etc . . .
- Schedule tours or provide opportunities for employees to shadow those who work in different areas
- Employee quizzes on County facts . . . results posted to Web/Intranet/ FastLane
- Create information packets to help educate employees (make available to department heads and for others as requested or post on Intranet)
- Contests: Monthly pop quizzes on the Intranet, write-in fact quizzes, scavenger hunt . . . facts spread throughout county departments for employees to compile and then submit (possible prizes such as additional TM, gift certificates, shirt with County message on it, emergency kits, free self-defense class and other prizes)
- Develop a "quick facts" on how we got here (budget information)
- Identify and work with those most likely within each division to help get the materials into employee's hands
- Include organized labor leadership in communications planning efforts
- Establish a process for communicating with labor leadership – they serve as an important communication channel for disseminating information to employees
- Work with labor group leadership to get feedback on attitudes related to employee communication initiative and public initiative



## Communications Plan Timeline and Costs

STRATEGY	TACTIC	INITIATED	FREQUENCY	EST. COST	REMARKS
<b>Develop key messages</b>					
	Identify core messages employees should know	First Quarter 2006	Ongoing	N/C	
	"Did You Know" facts in every department	First Quarter 2006	Ongoing	UNK	
	Work with steering committee on message development	First Quarter 2006	As needed	UNK	
<b>Provide information</b>					
	County finances and O&C "quick facts"	First Quarter 2006	Ongoing	UNK	
	Create information packets, brochures, etc.	Second Quarter 2006	Ongoing	UNK	
<b>Spreading information</b>					
	PowerPoint and video presentations	First and Second Quarter 2006	As needed	UNK	* no direct cost but loss of hrs/work
	Employee meetings	First/Second Quarters 2006	Two week period	UNK	* no direct cost but loss of hrs/work
	Training/Guidance for department leaders	First Quarter 2006	As needed	UNK	* no direct cost but loss of hrs/work
	Recruit employees for employee initiative	First Quarter 2006	Ongoing	UNK	* no direct cost but loss of hrs/work
<b>Strengthen</b>					

<b>BOC/Staff communications</b>					
	“From the Commissioners Desk” memos	Throughout initiative	Each week	N/C	
	Op-eds/Commentaries	Throughout initiative	Bi-weekly	N/C	
	Commissioner Recaps	Throughout initiative	Each week	N/C	
<b>Learning from each other</b>					
	Tours/job shadow opportunities	Throughout initiative	As needed	UNK	
	Questionnaires	Throughout initiative	Monthly	UNK	
	Service related articles for FastLane	Throughout initiative	Monthly	N/C	
<b>Contests</b>					
	Monthly pop quizzes on Intranet	Throughout initiative	Monthly	UNK	Prizes for all contests
	Write-in fact quizzes	Once per quarter	Quarterly	UNK	
	Scavenger hunt	Second/Third? Quarter 2006	One time	UNK	